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Statewide Science Assessment Results Released

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION – The Agency of Education today released the Spring 2014 science assessment results for Vermont students in grades four, eight, and 11 during a press conference held at White River School in White River Junction.

The results show that 44 percent of Vermont fourth graders scored as proficient or higher in science, down three percentage points from last year's cohort. In grade eight, 25 percent were proficient or higher, seven percentage points lower than 2013. In grade 11, 30 percent were proficient or higher, one percentage point lower than 2013.

The science assessment, which is part of the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), is designed to measure students' scientific literacy and inquiry. This is the seventh year of administration of the NECAP science assessment, which combines scores from multiple choice and short answer questions with results from an inquiry task that requires students to analyze and interpret findings from an actual science experiment. Rhode Island and New Hampshire, Vermont's partners in the NECAP consortium, also saw a similar drop in reported scores.

Statewide results:

Assessment Area and Grade	Percent Proficient or Above				
	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
NECAP Science Grade 04	44%	47%	53%	53%	54%
NECAP Science Grade 08	25%	32%	30%	29%	29%
NECAP Science Grade 11	30%	31%	33%	30%	28%

"While some individual schools are doing very well, we are not satisfied with these scores," said Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education, at today's announcement. "Unfortunately, we have not seen scores improve over several years' worth of data. This suggests that instructional time for science may be getting squeezed out in some places due to the federal emphasis in the No Child Left Behind Act on English language arts and math."

"It is important to remember that what we are looking at is a statewide average, which doesn't show the whole picture," added Michael Hock, the Agency's State Director of Assessment. "Some Vermont schools are doing remarkably well, which is one of the reasons we are highlighting the good work happening here at White River School. They serve a diverse socio-economic population

and have made consistent efforts to ensure all students are given the opportunity to succeed. On average, the students from poverty here at White River are outscoring the state average of all students, from poverty or not.”

Schools like White River that have developed a system of professional development for their science educators, and ensure that the development is happening system-wide, tend to perform better in these assessments.

Suzan Locke, Hartford School District Science teacher leader, said, “the Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards can work together to improve student learning in science and across all content areas. For many children, science is the hook that gets them to wonder, ask questions, solve problems, and use evidence to support their thinking.”

A portion of the assessment that seems to be the biggest challenge to students is the inquiry portion, which requires students to solve problems and then explain their work. They may draw accurate conclusions but seem to lack the ability to explain the reasoning for their answer. The Agency offers “inquiry-based” professional development to improve not only science instruction but learning in other subjects as well.

As seen in previous years, statewide and nationally, an achievement gap persists between students from low-income families and their peers. In Vermont, the science achievement gap continues to be approximately 24 percent, or six scaled score points.

Assessment Area and Grade	Free/Reduced Lunch Status	Scale Score				
		2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
NECAP Science Grade 04	FRL	34.52	34.93	35.95	36.43	35.81
NECAP Science Grade 04	Not FRL	40.82	41.65	43.11	42.99	42.66
NECAP Science Grade 08	FRL	30.56	31.71	31.31	30.52	30.55
NECAP Science Grade 08	Not FRL	36.78	37.76	37.32	36.85	37.04
NECAP Science Grade 11	FRL	30.62	30.56	30.47	30.17	30.52
NECAP Science Grade 11	Not FRL	36.54	36.78	36.81	36.13	35.73

School reports are available online:

http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_assessment/data.html#necap.

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